



# NAPTA Headlines

March 2006

## DIY can be best

Evidence from thousands of schools across the country indicates that much of the best professional development work for and with support staff occurs in schools themselves. Matching the more strategic needs of the school to the needs of the individual members of your staff can often lead to the

greatest achievements. Clearly, for some staff, longer accredited courses are also appropriate. (See information on the new VQ overleaf.) Detailed NAPTA reports can help you work out what is best for which staff, and how to structure your in-house CPD.

### ▶ Make the most of your reports

Remember to take advantage of the private members' area of the NAPTA Web site. From here, you can download extra documents providing additional advice on making the most of your NAPTA reports.

Log on at [www.napta.org.uk](http://www.napta.org.uk) using the details provided on your new membership card, and follow the link from the Welcome page.

*Improve the lives of children...*

## Every Child Matters

The Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, was published in 2003 and was followed, after a period of consultation, by *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. The Every Child Matters (ECM) initiative aims, in part, to address the failures of communication that led to cases like that of Victoria Climbié, who died as a result of severe abuse.

ECM and the ideas it contains will influence school management, affect the ways in which support staff work, and have wide-ranging implications for schools and education for years to come. It has already led to the introduction of extended schools and the requirement for schools to work together and with other agencies, such as the NHS and social services.

ECM aims to improve the lives of children through five intended outcomes. These involve all staff in schools:

**Be healthy** – Schools can help their pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle through health education, as well as by questioning the value of snacks and the nutritional content of school meals. Lunchtime supervisors and support staff who run breakfast clubs will play a leading role in this and so need to be made aware of the importance of ECM.

**Stay safe** – Pupils need to feel that they are protected from harm and neglect. Behaviour management and anti-bullying must continue to be priorities, and all staff – both inside and outside the classroom – must be involved. Pupils need to feel as safe during breaks as they do when they are being taught.

### Enjoy and achieve

– Despite a general trend of academic improvement, there are still problems with levels of achievement for certain groups, including boys and some ethnic minorities. In addition, the rate of unauthorised absences remains high. Maintaining and raising achievement at all levels depends on the adults working in school, for example, teaching assistants can give focused support to those who need it most, and male staff can provide role models for boys.



### Contribute to their community

– Pupils should be involved in their local community and should not engage in anti-social or offending behaviour. Support staff who have close links with local institutions and groups are a vital commodity, as are community leaders who can come into school and work alongside teachers and pupils in the classroom.

### Achieve economic well-being

– Economic disadvantage must not prevent pupils from achieving their full potential in life. Schools must enable all pupils to reach the highest standards and to break the cycle of poverty. Disadvantaged pupils will benefit from as much support as possible from teaching assistants, as well as increased opportunities through clubs and outside visits.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ▶ Recognising experience and skills

There will soon be a new vocational qualification (VQ) aimed at recognising the skills of all support staff in schools. The qualification requires staff to demonstrate competence against a set of occupational standards in a similar way to existing NVQs; however, it adopts a significantly lighter-touch approach for both learners and schools.

For further details, see the NAPTA Web site at [www.napta.org.uk](http://www.napta.org.uk).

### ▶ Having your say

NAPTA is always keen to receive feedback from readers. If you would like to submit an article for *NAPTA Headlines* or have a question you would like NAPTA's experts to answer, you can do so via NAPTA's Web site at [www.napta.org.uk](http://www.napta.org.uk).

### ▶ Special offers for members

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Find out more on the NAPTA Web site at [www.napta.org.uk](http://www.napta.org.uk).

## Creating a stress-free school

As schools become increasingly complex and staff numbers grow, stress can become an even more significant problem. In order to give staff the support they need, it is important to be able to recognise the symptoms of stress. These include sleeplessness and difficulty relaxing; irritability; fear of the future and of failure; difficulty concentrating; and difficulty completing jobs and meeting deadlines.

Individuals who are easily stressed can be impatient with others and over-competitive; however, their drive and creative edge would soon be missed. Some people cope better with stress than others, but both types of person are necessary in a school.

High burnout, stressful schools tend to have:

- an autocratic management style
- only academic goals
- clearly-defined and entrenched hierarchies
- individuals working alone rather than in teams.

Low burnout, less stressful schools tend to have:

- flexible educational objectives
- less pressure for unrealistic high standards
- a management structure where teachers and support staff meet to take decisions and to socialise.

Minimising stress involves helping people to do the jobs that they are best at in ways that make it easy for them to be successful. Unrelenting pressure to complete difficult tasks within unrealistic deadlines does not help anyone to be more effective. It is almost always counter-productive in the long term, leading to a cycle of exhaustion and stress that is difficult to break.

The following conditions help to make the working environment less stressful:

- trusting teams to get on with their jobs
- open leadership and decision making
- approachability and sharing issues with colleagues
- honesty and reliability
- sharing and democratic participation
- tolerance and mutual cooperation
- support for all colleagues who need it
- interchangeable and flexible roles and responsibilities
- humour, including the ability to see the funny side of mistakes
- **a realistic approach to work.**

